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Chief, DR/CD

The Biographic Register, A Resume of Its Current Problems

1. The current flap engendered by overtones of disharmony within the Register that have reached the "hill" needs neither a defense nor explanation. However, it might be well to review some of the difficulties now confronting DR.
2. The principal problems are these:
 - a. Lack of equitable distribution of workloads within the Register;
 - b. Dependence on a system of processing data that is inefficient;
 - c. Staff, which with several exceptions, is weak, particularly in its administrative echelons.
3. Each of these problems has an easily traced history. The lack of an equitable distribution of workloads has come about because of a reluctance to recognize that the intelligence demands of CIA upon the Regional Branch are unique and exceed in number and variety those levied against the Scientific Branch. This reluctance is based in part upon the false assumption that State/BI, if the chips are down, can adequately backstop DR and in part upon the apparently overwhelming influence of NSCIB-8. As a result, attempts to build a T/O consistent with developing workloads have been futile, and we are in the peculiar position today of having precisely the same number of billets in both branches and operating under the flat edict that no internal adjustments in personnel assignments shall be made.

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When I first came to BR the disparity between the workloads of the two branches (scientific and regional) was obvious. By the end of 1950 the backlogs of unprocessed documents in the Regional Branch far exceeded those in the Scientific Branch, and within the Division as a whole, the number, roughly estimated, approximated 78,000. A review of any of the recent monthly reports indicates that respectively the ratio is 9 to 1; 10,000 documents received by the Regional Branch and 1,200 by the Scientific Branch a month. The number of requests received by the two branches also has been markedly disproportionate, the Regional Branch, having exactly the same number of personnel, served up 3 times as many written reports in 1951 as the Scientific Branch. Rumblings of discontent with the progress in the Regional Branch began to boil over in early 1951, and throughout the past year I have been plagued constantly by Section Chiefs who were threatening to resign unless some relief could be obtained. Those threats were countered with hopeful statements of a better system for processing operations, increased T/O, and possible consolidation with the Scientific Branch in order to distribute the prevailing workload.

NSCID-8 has come to exert an influence far beyond that which justly can be accorded it, primarily because it is unique in its biographic flavor and can be used for heavy leverage on budget. Actually, CIA would have acquired its prominence in scientific biography quite apart from the directive, simply by default of non-interested, though otherwise competitive enterprises, such as BI/State. Over concentration of the Interagency responsibility allocated to the Scientific Branch has obscured the fact that BR's scientific services are preponderately directed to OSI,

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which is only one consumer of biographic intelligence. It has tended, moreover, to detract from the importance of BR's mission under NSCID-3 to service CIA's requirements in non-scientific fields (those of OCI, ORR, OPC, OSO), which now represent more than 65% of BR's total effort.

The other factor which has led to the subversion of BR's internal obligations has been the popularly maintained fallacy that State has available all the data needed to meet CIA's requirements in fields of political and economic biography. This despite the fact that Mr. Heck of State has commented for the record that State's interest in personalities is based generally on prominence, and the multitude of lesser fry, which are among the prime interests of CIA's operations offices, are by-passed altogether. Even under its antiquated procedures, BR now has under control a wealth of biographic information, which, while not of essential interest to State, is locally the meat of many intelligence analysts.

One of the obligations of my job has been to review constantly the procedures and services of this Division with an eye toward improvement. Clearly some change in the method of processing was warranted by the end of 1950, and after working on a program throughout the summer and fall, a system was proposed that constitutes, by reference, the subject of the second major problem discussed below. Quite apart from this system, however, it was absolutely essential that some adjustment in workload between the Scientific and Regional Branches be effected. In November 1951, I advocated the reassignment of 6 - 8 members of the Scientific Branch to the Regional Branch and thereby came into immediate conflict with the "good conscience" of the Chief of my Scientific Branch. As the

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result of his dissent and unilateral presentation thereof directly to you, I found myself confronted with a decision that no internal shift in personnel was to be effected. This still seems to me to be an ill-advised decision, though it has been followed to the letter.

4. The second main problem confronting the Division is the inadequacy of its method of processing biographic data. Budget estimates of the past have been based on the incredibly low production rate of 20 old or new cases processed per day per analyst, provided the analyst devotes full time to processing. In 1951 the total number of old and new cases processed in the Division came to 59,553, representing about 7 cases per day per analyst, assuming 40 employees were engaged in processing on a part time basis. In the same year approximately 600,000 name references were reported in documents received by the Register. Of these, a portion was indexed by name, country, and document citation (about 305,000), and the rest constitute unindexed backlog. The major issue of this problem I have already presented in writing which you have alluded to as philosophy. In a sense that is exactly what is involved. Do we spend "the whole day working in a dossier" and pile up backlogs, or do we get the bulk of biographic information under control, at least from a surname approach? The system which the Scientific Branch still employs came into being in 1948, and except for the use of McBee cards, which at first were bitterly opposed by the pro-folder dossier clique, no modification in technique has been developed or even suggested from within the ranks until the 4-way indexing theory became the subject of an experiment in late 1951. For example, on frequent occasions I have proposed the use of occupational punching to augment file-2, but this was firmly rejected until it was brought up recently by the Chief

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of the Scientific Branch as backfire to combat the 4-way indexing method. The constant willingness to predict failure for any new proposal, and the bulldog tenacity to hang onto a procedure once it has been adopted, even if by force, characterizes some segments of my staff. Only a firm administrative stand can cope with such obstancy. This example can be followed by another. I proposed the use of a name-document citation index (file-2) as a method of controlling biographic data shortly after I joined the staff in 1949. It has been the subject of a running battle of complaints ever since, based primarily on the lack of rapid service in obtaining the documents from the Library, yet on innumerable occasions it has been the only source extant yielding useful data on a named person. Analysts, as the saying goes, are squirrels. If the information is not on their desks or next to them in file cabinets, whatever system is employed will be condemned. It is not a matter of urgency that leads to criticism of the Library service, for most requests are answered to the consumer's satisfaction in from one to three days, but simply a disinclination to be bothered by any delay in view of work pressures.

The time wasted within the Scientific Branch under its operating procedures is significant. Much of it is needlessly spent in typing abstracts or reproducing numerous copies of a given document, particularly in the case of one reference fragments pertaining to names which history has already demonstrated will probably not be mentioned again and perhaps never become the subject of intelligence interest. Such material could be much more rapidly indexed and be every bit as available in the document reference file as in the dossier reference file. The use of a quantitative guide to the establishment of a dossier is a

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highly desirable refinement of the 4-way indexing system. It has been proposed that the accumulation of 5 references would signal the preparation of a dossier. This has been objected to by some analysts on the grounds that they would not have time to police the files to discover those names on whom a dossier should be established from the quantitative standpoint. The fact that if they stop to make up a dossier on one reference citations every time they are encountered, and they constitute over two-thirds of the bulk of those now being turned out by the Scientific Branch, they will never be able to keep abreast of the inflowing documents, never seems to be a source of concern. Thus, the Scientific Branch, with its minimal processing workloads, continues to build up backlogs of file-2 references, in spite of a document take averaging less than two per person per day. These file-2 references, or selected backlog listings as they are now called, do not lend themselves to selection by category (occupation, organization, etc.).

If BR is going to meet its obligations, it needs to modernize its procedures. Production could be stepped up by 1) discontinuing the establishment of one reference dossiers, 2) cutting sharply the duplication of documents for filing under every name mentioned therein, 3) adopting minimum time consuming processing procedures consistent with priorities accorded to countries and individuals, 4) maximum use of the advantages inherent in the IBM machines, 5) allocation of personnel who will carry out the processing operations without the constant interruption imposed by servicing requests. Production and quality are not incompatible. The methods of processing under the 4-way indexing procedure will go far, not only in improving the quality of BR's product by making more name data immediately available, but also in making available for the

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first time important intelligence tools that are the natural by-products of the biographic operation; viz., files on organizations, fields of conversance, political affiliations, and a host of others organized by category. The Regional Branch, despite its manpower shortage, has made substantial strides forward in the past two months since the alternative systems of indexing have been developed. Analysts, on their own initiative, may make a dossier, an index-abstract card, or underline names for 2-way indexing by the key-punch personnel of the Index Branch. They are guided in their selection of the system to be used by the importance of the individual, his activities, his organizational and political affiliations, as well as by the time available to completely work over the daily take of documents. In addition, analysts, in the case of low country or individual priorities, may simply file the documents by country or by subject, maintaining only a very general index reference to the classes of documents so stored. It is not likely that even with these options the Regional Branch can process, as the analysts would prefer, all the documents it receives without an increase in T/O, but it will come very close to doing so. Its production of index-abstract cards now averaged over 12,000 a month and will continue to rise.

The Scientific Branch, on the other hand, does not have the same flexibility in its system. It either makes a dossier or 2-way indexes the name data it receives which is subject to surname approach only. Thus, the material that is 2-way indexed produces no category information which is essential to the proper maintenance of scientific biography, and the dossier production of the entire branch remains at the absurdly low level of 2,400 new and 400 old cases a month. It cannot adequately

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process now its daily take of documents which averages close to 60 as contrasted to the nearly 500 received daily by the Regional Branch.

5. The third problem before the Register relates to personnel administration. It is complicated by factors unique to CIA's employment practices. For example, clerks are assigned to BR without previous screening by the Division's administrators. Too often, these so-called clerks are aggressive college graduates who are not trained in clerical functions and who, after obtaining a degree, cannot be expected in this day and age to be satisfied with clerical duties. They usually leave, unless rapidly promoted into professional positions, and are a constant source of demoralizing remarks to their associates and supervisors until something is done.

A second source of difficulty in BR is the recruitment of employees qualified for the higher professional grades. During the initial growth of the Agency, the competition for first class employees was keen, and BR was naturally low in priority for persons of top caliber. BR has therefore accumulated a staff which, by all fair standards, may be regarded as only slightly above average. There are exceptions, of course, but most of these represent persons who have come in through the back door, or who have been recruited recently under the Agency's expanded and improved recruitment program. It is the policy of the Agency to promote employees on duty in preference to filling vacancies from the outside. This, coupled with the delay in clearing personnel, and excessive workloads that had to be handled somehow, has resulted in the promotion of many employees to positions entailing certain implied responsibilities omitted in job descriptions that they are not equipped to handle. For example, experience on the job is important, but if when

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gaining this experience the individual is daily oppressed by accumulating backlogs of data to be processed or requests to be answered, and is engaged in a generally routine operation, he is not likely to develop a properly aggressive attitude or to offer the constructive criticisms that are so essential to a thriving, progressive organization. Instead, he is likely to develop a fear of new ideas and a resistance to any change in the status quo. Those who have been engaged in industrial research, or who served in important administrative capacities know the value of new ideas, but staff members who have had no such experience tend to look at new solutions to broad problems of policy and procedure from a purely subjective standpoint.

Mature views and attitudes, shaped by education and long varied experience, constitute important qualifications that unfortunately have not received proper emphasis in the rush to secure employees or retain their services in the face of rapidly increasing workloads. Experience in BR indicates that when employees lacking previous administrative training are promoted to administrative positions, they shed their cloistered attributes very slowly, unless there is a marked difference in functional responsibility. Such persons, barring a few outstanding exceptions, find it difficult, if not impossible, to compose their thinking along administrative lines. They tend to confine the practice of administration to seeking the contentment of their employees, and underemphasize production requirements. This, obviously, is the easiest path to follow. The development of good personnel relations is desirable, but failure to bring out the maximum contribution of subordinates represents a serious administrative deficiency. When, as frequently in BR,

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the section chiefs feel so swamped with their own country assignments that they give little time to either the maintenance of good personnel relations or efficient staff operation, they serve as administrators in name only, and the Division suffers accordingly.

Another administrative headache stems from the general diffusion of responsibilities as the result of heavy workloads. Once a clerk is assimilated into the ranks of the Regional Branch, she gradually assumes analyst's duties. When requests come thick and fast, the members of an entire section may be drawn into action, and if no one but a clerk is available to prepare a response, the clerk may be called upon to do so. Naturally she is given the simpler and more easily answered requests, but partly by wishful thinking she soon imagines herself as an analyst and in due course is clamoring for less routine work and more salary. If neither is granted, she becomes unhappy, restless, and inclined to criticize her superiors locally and publicly.

The solution to these personnel problems, which represent but a few of those daily encountered, are fairly obvious, but not easily obtained. My own experience indicates that the success of the Division as a whole is largely dependent upon the section chiefs, both as reflected in qualities of leadership and ability to participate in the administrative teamwork of developing an efficient, productive staff. My work, therefore, has been largely with the section chiefs, and I have come to know them fairly well. I can say all of them are conscientious. Each one, as do myself and deputy, has certain strengths and weaknesses. The latter may be rationalized to some extent due to circumstances that prevail in the Register which have been touched on, in part, above. There are, of course, persons who could do a better job in each instance, but

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we might easily have been less fortunate in our selections. Not only are these people conscientious, but they are entirely forthright in their views relating to the Division's operations. Moreover, with one exception, they are perfectly candid in their appraisal of my abilities, not that they are outspoken, but they are relatively unaffected individuals and it is easy to perceive their feelings. I am in a position to weigh their relative merits, whereas their judgments of me are based, more or less, on the absolutes of my performance. I am sure most of them regard me as unaffected, not necessarily the best man for the job, and perhaps unsophisticated in my attempts to be diplomatic.

Other than integrity and intelligence, one of the most important characteristics by which I judge the section chiefs is their willingness to carry out orders, not only the oral or written order, but the spirit of the order. There are invariably differences in opinion as to policies or procedures developed within the staff and sometimes in interpreting orders originating from without. These are generally thrashed out individually and collectively, using a common sense approach, for none of us is particularly clairvoyant. However, when the decision rests with me and I make it, some may find it personally obnoxious and of these a few refuse to implement it, or support it so halfheartedly that it has no effect. Others who may consider a decision unsound will nevertheless follow it to the letter, even though they reserve and exercise the right to criticize constructively the effect after implementation. I can name unhesitatingly those who fall in one or the other of these two categories, and while I could easily do without the non-conformists, I am myself partly responsible for not insisting

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on strict adherence to BR's administrative directives. This personal deficiency I am inclined to blame, in my weak moments, on a feeling of insecurity with regard to your administrative support of my decisions.

6. In summary, it can be stated fairly that most of the problems now encountered by BR will be solved in due course. Some will take longer than others, perhaps in a few cases a year or more. Others will remain as a constant challenge, chiefly those relating to personnel administration. I have no qualms as to the ability of this office to deal with them, even to the extent of prevailing upon my section chiefs to let me bear the ultimate responsibility for decisions affecting the Division.



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